

MIGHTY LORDS, KINGS AND QUEENS: AN INTROSPECTIVE LOOK AT DOCUMENTING CALYPSO CULTURE IN ARUBA

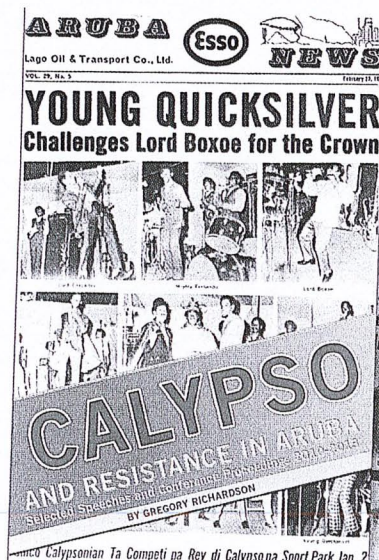
Gregory Richardson

There is a big discussion, about where carnival start
Some say down in Playa, some say up in San Nicolas
I don't care what they got to say, I just glad we carnival
here to stay
So come let us appreciate, one and all, come let we
celebrate
(Chorus)
Don't hold back
I come to sing the truth, Yuh messing with me roots
Don't hold back
SAC yuh damn well know, San Nicolas is calypso
Yuh better watch what you say, say what you mean
No holding back, just come clean
I think it's time to let go, and give back we show and
enjoy our calypso
Lady Mezzo
Don't Hold Back

My research has shown that many persons in Aruba are not aware of Calypso's long and storied tradition throughout the world, with a history of over 100 years. Specifically in the literature of the Anglophone Caribbean, we see calypso music being described by scholars such as Gordon Rohlehr, Hollis Liverpool, Keith Warner and others as "the voice of the poor" and/or "the voice of the marginalized". It is also described as one of the main vehicles used by inhabitants of the region to document their histories via oral literature. I should mention that this is not only the case in the English speaking Caribbean, calypso has also made its mark in both the Dutch as well as the Spanish Caribbean. I dare to even say, that much of Aruba's 20th century history is recorded in calypso. See/listen to Lord Boxoe's historical tale of Aruba and ode to the Lago refinery in She Stands as an example.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leGHQmaNVWs>

Lyrics like these by Lady Mezzo are often heard by many of us during the yearly calypso festival on Aruba and are often accepted as just another routine element of our yearly carnival celebration. Upon closer reflection, there is much more to it than meets the eye. If we take the time to really "listen" we start to hear things that we have never heard before, if we take the time to really "look", we start to see things that we have never seen before and if we take the time to really "feel", we start to experience things that we have never felt before. As part of my Socratic journey, I had the privilege of studying calypso music culture throughout the Caribbean, as a unique form of expression in our region. To me, the calypsonian was much like the urban proverb that speaks of "the rose in a concrete world" or rather, in the case of Aruba, "a cactus on the top of the Casibari". An anomaly so to speak; it was, but it wasn't supposed to be. Given my fascination with the art form, I felt it to be important to find out who these so called 'Barrio Poets' were, who identify themselves with royal names such as Mighty, Lord, Lady, King and Queen. I wanted to know what their backgrounds were, what shaped them, how they created and performed their art and maybe even more importantly, how they lived it!

The arrival of many Caribbean immigrants during the height of the petrol industry in the earlier half of the 20th century in Aruba, provided an interesting mix of cultures, languages and ethnicities which in turn provided a unique blend of experiences. It is within this mix that Aruban calypso, with its distinctly multilingual character has been developed and has become very popular. However, throughout the past 25 years, Aruban calypso music has lost much of its popularity. Many in the younger generation, for various reasons, don't see the importance of preserving and further developing the art form and its elements such as calypso song writing, performing and 'extempo-ing' (making



This short book on "calypso music and resistance in Aruba" is a compilation of selected conference proceedings and speeches given between the period of 2010 and 2013 by Gregory Richardson. This book aims to present new perspectives in the field of calypso research in a region (Dutch Caribbean) that has not yet sufficiently been explored. Themes such as double entendre (double meaning), multilingualism, male gossip, humor, social/political commentary and self reflection have been elaborated upon.
The Author is also the co-author of the book Sibling Voices of Sunrise City.

